

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 2

DEFINITION, PART 2

Concerning James 2, Wiersbe makes the assumption that those with a dead faith only have an intellectual grasp of the gospel fundamentals but he imposes his theology onto the text that such a faith is insufficient. The only requirement for faith is to believe the facts of the gospel concerning the object of faith and personally apply them to yourself completely apart from any works whatsoever. Theologians assuming James is referring to professing believers who have no real faith are engaging in eisegesis. In other words, they are putting their theological pretexts that faith must be accompanied by works or faith is false into the text and then using that tainted text to determine their conclusion. The James text—and the remainder of the Bible—do not support Wiersbe's conclusions. James is referring to believers who are not using their faith to do good works with the practical result that their faith is useless in the sanctification sense.

1 Timothy 4:16 ¹⁶Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation [σώζω] both for yourself and for those who hear you.

The issue here, as it is in all the verses relating to spiritual health post justification, is walking in the light, knowing, understanding, and adhering to sound doctrine, and glorifying the Lord as opposed to being subjected to at least stunted spiritual growth if not temporal discipline for failing to do these things. Once again, there is obviously a great deal of emphasis on the Word of God in the process of growing in spiritual maturity. Paul began this chapter by warning Timothy to beware of false teachers. By adhering to sound doctrine and persevering in it, both Timothy and his flock would be saved from the false doctrines of these heretical teachers.

For those theologians who only see justification salvation in this verse, they would say that “if Timothy persevered, his salvation would be evident to him as well as others. Both holy living and sound teaching are the inevitable fruits of saving faith” [Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, p. 141]. This verse isn't saying that at all. It is about Timothy faithfully watching his own life and teaching sound doctrine which would lead his flock into temporal salvation from false teachers. It is not about proving one's new birth. It is not inevitable that saving faith must produce good works. It is certainly what should be done but it is not inevitable.

Harry Ironside understood that Paul was not referring to justification salvation but rather to sanctification salvation. "He [Paul] is not speaking of the salvation of the soul. He is not referring to eternal salvation. But he is exhorting Timothy to be careful to live for God, to be a consistent, earnest minister of Christ, because in doing this he would both save himself and others from many snares and difficulties. He would become a blessing instead of a curse to those to whom he ministered" [H. A. Ironside, *An Ironside Expository Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p. 68]. What Ironside did miss was the salvation from false teaching context Paul began the chapter with but his thoughts are applicable to us in terms of avoiding the consequences of sin and temporal discipline by abiding in the word and walking in the Spirit. Maintaining a credible, faithful, obedient witness before others is vital for successful ministry.

Glorification salvation.

Romans 8:30³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Paul links justification and glorification in this Scripture and these two tenses of salvation are entirely guaranteed works of God. They are dependent only on the promises and works of God and only God can and will bring them about. But what is missing here? There is no mention of sanctification at all. The question is, why not? It isn't here because unlike justification and glorification which God guarantees, there is no guarantee of sanctification. It is the believer's responsibility to walk in the Spirit on a daily basis and to live a holy life. In light of this fact, how then can pastors and theologians demand, on the condition of eternal life, that justification is in any way dependent on sanctification? They can't do that and remain biblical. They can't do that and preach the gospel of grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone. Adding sanctification to justification makes it a false gospel. That's why this issue is so vitally important.

1 Corinthians 5:5⁵ I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved [σώζω] in the day of the Lord Jesus.

If sanctification was entirely dependent on God, would there be any believer so unfaithful and disobedient that they would need to be subjected to temporal discipline as was this man? Would there be any believer so sinful that they would suffer the consequences of their personal sins? No believer would be subject to these things if sanctification was totally God's work in us but because we participate in our sanctification, it is an imperfect walk and we may be subject to temporal discipline and the consequences of our personal sins. Yet, even after all that, we would still be saved in the sense of glorification salvation just as Paul recorded in this verse: "...so that his spirit may

be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." It is comforting to know that God's grace is operative in our lives not only for our justification but in our sanctification as well.

People may well ask, "What's the big deal? We want people to behave like Christians so why shouldn't we make that a requirement for justification salvation?" There are several things wrong with this thinking. Here are some of the problems with this line of thinking I've come up with; you may think of other reasons why it is incorrect.

First, when sanctification is added as an element of justification it is no longer the gospel which is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It has become a different gospel.

Ephesians 2:8–9 ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Second, backloading any sort of work into justification defeats God's operating principle of grace. In effect, adding works to justification is making the claim that Christ's work is insufficient and we have to help Him save us. If works are part of justification, then justification is no longer of faith but it is a debt owed us by God for services we have rendered to Him [Rom.4:1-8]. This is obviously false on its face; there is nothing we can do to merit justification.

Romans 4:1–8 ¹What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." ⁴Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. ⁵But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, ⁶just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. ⁸"BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

Our works are not meritorious before God; justification is completely the result of God's grace. James wrote that our works justify us in the sight of men (James 2:14-26) and that is also what Paul is recording for us here in verse 2. Works are an important part of the Christian walk but they do not justify us before God. This is nothing new; Abraham was justified before God based solely and simply on his faith and Paul quoted Genesis 15:6 to prove it in verse 3. James made the same point. Abraham was justified based on his faith and years later he was justified before men through his willingness to obey God and sacrifice Isaac on the altar built on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:1-14). Paul and James

are both presenting the truths of justification salvation and sanctification salvation and in so doing both men are declaring them to be distinct facets of salvation.

Paul goes on to present the truth that a person working for something has caused the employer to incur a debt for that work. Work creates a debt that is paid in the form of some sort of wage due the laborer for his efforts. The payment of this wage is not grace because grace is the freely given gift of what is not owed for work performed. Only when the gift is given out of the benevolence of the giver with no thought of repayment or merit, can the gift be called a grace gift. Grace, χάρις, means kindness, gift, goodwill; it is to show kindness to someone with the implication of graciousness on the part of the one showing such kindness. It is a favor done without any expectation of return. It is the complete opposite of works. Paul is telling us here in Romans that we cannot work for justification salvation; we believe for justification and believing is not a work.

This doctrine is extremely important; remember this Scripture. Many Christians have been taught as a part of their theological system that believing is a work; therefore, God must regenerate an elect person, in other words, make them a believer, and only then can they believe. In my mind, this doctrine is making the claim that we are born again by God apart from any belief on our part only to be born again when we believe. It's preposterous! It makes no biblical sense. The reason to remember this Romans scripture is because Paul is emphatically telling us that believing is not a work; he is very specific about that fact. Anyone who insists that God must regenerate a person in order for them to then believe the gospel and be saved is seriously ignorant of the truth Paul presents here in the Word of God. Later in this soteriology series, I will explain God's role in the process unbelievers undergo when coming to faith. I'm not suggesting here that unbelievers simply decide one day they are going to believe.

Third, we are commanded to preach the one true gospel of grace to people because that is the only gospel that can present them with the opportunity for the attainment of eternal life. Fourth, there is a curse placed on anyone who preaches a false gospel; false gospels, by definition, can only divert people from salvation and they cannot possibly present people with the opportunity to achieve salvation [Gal. 1:8-9].

Galatians 1:6–9 ⁶I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different [ἕτερος] gospel; ⁷which is really not another [ἄλλος]; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Paul is presenting the truth here that there is only one true gospel of grace and that is the only gospel that can present people with truth that can save them. The Galatian believers had fallen prey to a gospel of a different kind which was not the same gospel Paul had preached to them. This new gospel was a very different gospel from the good news Paul originally brought them. This different gospel was a departure from grace. No gospel other than the gospel of grace can save anyone; all else is false and a false gospel cannot save anyone. Paul goes on to pronounce a curse on anyone who preaches a false gospel. Accursed, *ἀνάθεμα*, means a curse; it is that which has been cursed. In this context, it refers to being under the curse of God in time; it is not referring to eternal condemnation. This Scripture is adamant that there is only one gospel and anyone preaching anything else is accursed. Correctly preaching the good news is vitally important for the sanctification well-being of the believer preaching it and for the unbeliever hearing it because eternal life is at stake.

Fifth, we simply cannot expect unbelievers to act like Christians are supposed to act according to revealed biblical standards; they don't know the Bible and they don't know how Christians are supposed to act (1 Cor. 2:14). That biblical knowledge is gained as a result of a teaching and discipleship process only after the new birth. We cannot possibly make sanctification knowledge of Christian conduct a requirement for justification salvation. If those who have been believers for a long time don't always act as Christians are "supposed" to act, how can we ever require a brand new believer to act that way? If the sanctification process can only begin after the new birth as a post justification process, how can it be a requirement for that new birth in the first place? It cannot.

1 Corinthians 2:14 ¹⁴But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Up until the point of regeneration, the unbeliever has spent his life rejecting the things of God. He has rejected the light God has provided as he experiences the drawing ministry of God. He may know some facts of the Bible, but he cannot spiritually understand them because it takes a spiritual mind to comprehend spiritual truth. Up to the moment of belief, all people are ungodly and walking in darkness unable to comprehend spiritual truth. Once they respond to the light and become believers, how then can we expect them to immediately begin living like a Christian is supposed to live? They have to be taught to live like a Christian. But what if they never live like a Christian? Can that undo the eternal life he was granted the moment of belief? No. Can a person become a believer for a time but as time goes on and he fails to progress in sanctification justification then lose his salvation? No. Sanctification is a separate issue from justification. God never fails in justification; believers can fail in sanctification.

An examination of other Scriptures using these two Greek words informs us that we cannot restrict their use to justification, sanctification, and glorification issues. In many cases, the meaning of “save” or “salvation” in these verses is very apparent and poses no interpretive problem. But as we have already seen in the verses where sanctification salvation is the subject, the true meaning of these words is dependent on the application of literal hermeneutics.

Luke 7:2–3 ²And a centurion’s slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. ³When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save [σώζω] the life of his slave.

In this case, “save” as it is used here refers to physically healing this sick slave and preventing his death from that illness. He was saved from his illness and he was saved from death. From the context of the entire pericope, it is clear that the centurion, the slave’s master, came to faith. The Lord Himself commended his “great faith” (v. 9). This slave was not saved in the justification sense at the time of his healing. He was physically saved from illness and death. However, if the centurion witnessed to him and he responded in belief, then that slave would have been justified at the moment of belief but that would have been later. We don’t know whether or not that happened because the Bible doesn’t say whether or not anyone else in the centurion’s household ever came to faith. The point I’m making here is the use of the word “save” has nothing to do with spiritual matters.

Matthew 8:25 ²⁵And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, “Save [σώζω] us, Lord; we are perishing!”

In this use of the word, the disciples thought they were going to perish in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. They wanted Jesus to save their physical lives.

Matthew 27:42 ⁴²“He saved [σώζω] others; He cannot save [σώζω] Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.

The chief priests, scribes, and elders were not acknowledging that Jesus had saved other people to eternal life in the justification sense; they knew He had saved the lives of many people in a physical sense. They were calling on Him to save Himself in like manner. They were mocking His claim to be the King of Israel and the Son of God.